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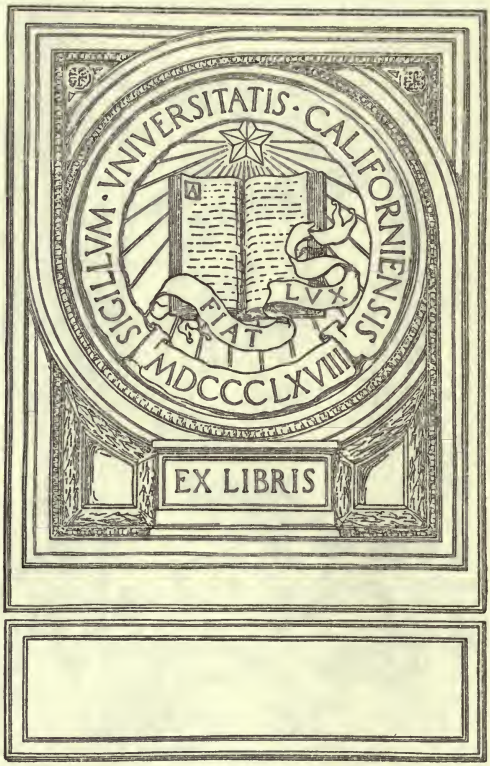
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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

THE
PILGRIM BOOKS

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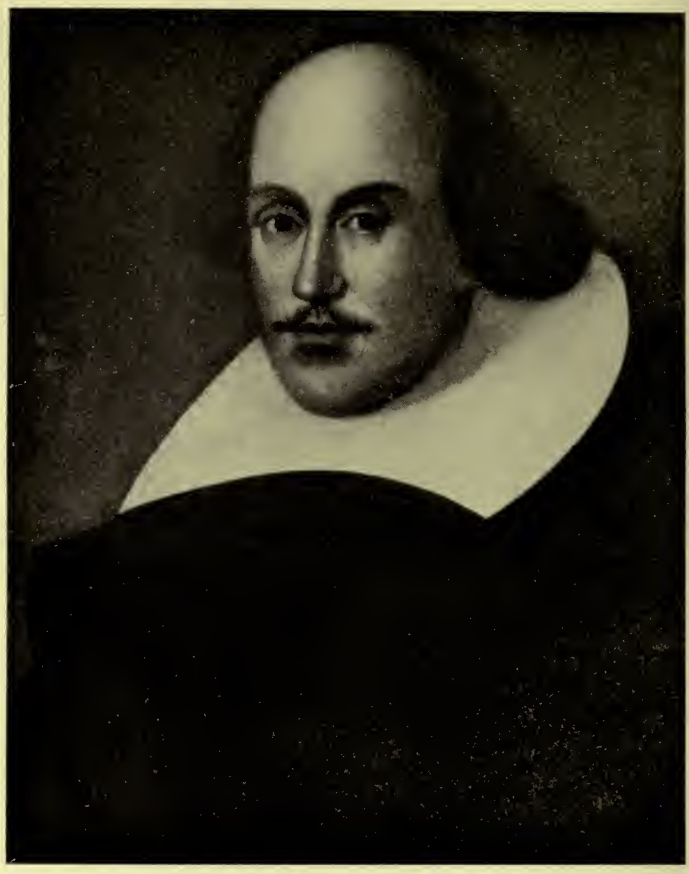

THE ELY PALACE PORTRAIT AT SHAKESPEARE'S BIRTHPLACE

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

HIS HOMES AND HAUNTS

BY

S. L. BENSUSAN

WITH TWELVE DRAWINGS IN CRAYON BY
A. FORRESTIER
AND FOUR PORTRAITS

LONDON: T. C. & E. C. JACK
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PREFACE

In telling the story of Shakespeare's life and work within strict limits of space, an attempt has been made to keep closely to essential matters. There is no period of the poet's life, there is no branch of his marvellous work, that has not been the subject of long and learned volumes, no single play that has not been discussed at greater length than serves here to cover the chief incidents of work and life together. If the Homes and Haunts do not claim the greater part of the following pages, it is because nobody knows where to find them to-day. Stratford derives much of its patronage from unsupported traditions, the face of London has changed, and though we owe to the painstaking researches of Dr. Chas. Wm. Wallace the very recent discovery that the poet lodged with a wig-maker named Mountjoy at the corner of Silver and Monkwell Streets in the City of London, much labour must be accomplished before we shall be able to follow his wanderings between the time of his arrival in and departure from the metropolis.

For the purposes of this little book many authorities have been consulted, and the writer is specially indebted to the researches of Dr. Sidney Lee, the leading authority of our time on Shakespeare, and the late Professor Churton Collins.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

CHAPTER I

STRATFORD-ON-AVON

To read the works of a great master of letters, or to study the art of a great painter, without some first-hand knowledge of the country in which each lived and from which each gathered his earliest inspiration, is to court an incomplete impression. It is in the light of a life story and its setting, however slight our knowledge, that creative work tends to assume proper proportions. It is in the surroundings of the author that we find the key to the creation. For, as Gray has pointed out in his "Elegy written in a Country Churchyard," there are many in the dust and silence whose hands "the rod of Empire might have swayed, or waked to ecstasy the living lyre."

We know that it is not enough to have the creative force dormant in the mind; environment must be favourable to its development, or it will sleep too long. We see in the briefest survey of the lives of the poet, the statesman, the soldier and the artist, that there are many great ones who would have been

greater still were it not that then, as now, "man is one and the fates are three."

To study the life history of a man and to consider its setting is to understand why he succeeded and how he came to fail, and our wonder at his success will not be lessened when we find that some simple event, favourable or untoward, was the deciding factor in a great life. The hour brings the man, but circumstances mould him and chance leads him to the fore, unless it be true that "there's a Divinity that shapes our ends, rough hew them how we will." In our own time we have seen how the greatest empire-builder of Victorian history, Cecil John Rhodes, came into prominence because he was sent to South Africa for the cure of weak lungs. And, looking back to the life and times of William Shakespeare, who has summed up for so many of his fellow-countrymen, and still more strangers, the whole philosophy of life, we shall see that he became articulate through what he may have reasonably regarded as mischance.

Out in the autumn fields, the pigeon and the squirrel, to say nothing of other birds and beasts, hunt for acorns to eat or store. On the road to roost or storehouse many are dropped. Of these no small number fall on waste ground; a few take root, only to be overgrown or destroyed before they reach the beginnings of strength. But here and there an acorn drops on favourable soil; the rich earth nourishes it; the germ, when it has lived on all the store within the shell, can gather its future needs from the ground.

Little roots and fibres pierce the soil; a green twig rises to seek the sun; there are long years of silent precarious growth, and then the sapling stage is passed and a young tree sends countless leaves to draw nourishment from air and sky. Following this comes the time when no storm can uproot the tree that a hungry rabbit might have destroyed in days past—something has come to complete maturity and has developed all the possibilities that were equally latent in so many million acorns to which growth was denied. As it is with plants, so it is with men, and thus it becomes permissible to compare literature with a forest wherein are so many trees, so many saplings, and so much dense undergrowth, from which trees of worth and beauty may one day spring. In our national forest there is an oak that first saw life in the year 1564. There are many older trees of splendid worth, but this is the one which stands alone. What manner of soil nourished it? Whence came its strength? This little work is a brief attempt to set the well-known answer down again in a form that may offer a certain convenience in point of size and selection to lovers of a great poet.

When we read Shakespeare's plays for the first time, it is at once apparent that the poet was a countryman. He has the knowledge, founded upon close observation, that we associate with the highly intelligent dweller in the countryside, the man or woman from whom the poet differs merely in his supreme capacity for expression. We turn again to

his scenes of city life to find he is no less at home there. It is quite another world, but he has fathomed it; quite another company of men, but he has gauged their strength and weakness, the pathos and humour of their lives. He deals with rulers and courts, and his touch is as sure and faithful as before; his genius has taught him that kings and queens are men and women like the rest of us, that environment cannot alter fundamental characteristics, that royalty is swayed by the same forces that rule the lives of lesser men.

Only when he deals with foreigners the poet of Avon is often an unconscious humorist, for his store of geography is inadequate to meet the small demands upon it, and some of his simple errors, such as "the seashore of Bohemia," excite our kindly laughter now. But it is easy to see that the poet's habit of accurate observation was established in the country and that he applied to the larger life of London the self-taught methods he had acquired in the little town of his birth.

It is on this account that the minds of his admirers turn to Stratford-on-Avon, and the footsteps of enthusiasts are directed, year in, year out, to the pleasant county of Warwickshire. In and around Stratford we can keep company with the poet in his earliest and latest days; nor can the bustling crowds of tourists from all parts, the clamour of innkeepers and coach-drivers, the ever-present determination to turn a national genius to profitable account, stir our deep content. Men and public places have changed, but

THE HOME OF JOHN SHAKESPEARE—SNITTERFIELD

the country is as it was when William Shakespeare, poor and little known, was gathering the stores of knowledge and habit of thought that were to lift him to heights no following Englishman has scaled.

The wayfarer coming into Stratford for the first time to pay his mute tribute to the poet who seems destined to live as long as our civilisation, will enjoy a pleasant impression if he chance to have chosen a fine day and to have reached the town by the road. Stratford lies on the right bank of the river Avon, a beautiful river whose waters flow peacefully over the level land on their way from Naseby to the Severn. The town was happily planned of old time, and owed its inception to the establishment of a monastery shortly after the Anglo-Saxon began to take an interest in Christianity. It is clear that Stratford enjoyed three centuries of comparative peace, if not of substantial progress, before Norman William and Saxon Harold met at Senlac; echoes of that fray could not have pierced to the little town on Avon's banks. Nor have the subsequent centuries done much to disturb its natural seclusion.

The hand of the builder has raised streets of prosperous shops and new-built villas; small hotels abound; there is a bustling railway and a sleepy canal. A Memorial Theatre overlooks the river, and cyclists pass, not singly but in battalions, along peaceful roads leading to Birmingham or Warwick. Throughout the summer season Stratford-on-Avon becomes a metropolis "whereunto the tribes of men assemble." To "do Stratford"

is an article of faith with American visitors, even if they have no more than a week in which to master the wonders of Great Britain and Ireland. Germany sends many admirers, for nowhere is Shakespeare's genius more widely recognised, more highly esteemed, than in that country. London and the big midland towns of England send visitors daily.

Let it be suggested, with all due respect to those who think otherwise, that there is no reward for those who seek to discover Shakespeare's land in the course of a few hours' hurried travel. They will see Shakespeare's alleged birthplace, and the room in which he is said, without much authority, to have been born. They will pass through the Museum, Library, and Picture Gallery; they may even admire the rather poor monument in Holy Trinity Church, and perhaps a few other sights that the town affords; and then, with a welter of confused impressions, will return whence they came. There is no reward for this frenzied exercise; it is impossible to gather any impression of the scenes in which the poet passed his early and later days, from a hurried scamper through the town and a frank acceptance of local traditions, concerning which some of our leading Shakespearian scholars have much destructive critical comment to offer. He who wishes to establish some manner of association with the poet must enter Stratford as the poet left it—by the road. He should leave the railway and walk in from Warwick, find quiet lodgings, of which there is no lack, in the town, and visit in turn the highways and by-ways of Stratford, Snitterfield, Wilm-

cote, Aston Clinton, Shottery, Wotten Wawens, Charlecote, and a dozen other points of interest, of which he will learn when he has definitely left the ranks of excursionists and has made friends among the people of Shakespeare's countryside. He will not add a jot to our knowledge of country or people—a hundred pens have said all there is to say—but he will come away with a measure of appreciation and recognition that will make the significance of the poet, as an interpreter of a life that never changes, far more vital and true. Here is no small reward for a truly delightful holiday in country full of the best traditions of rural England. And the intelligent visitor will be one with the great lovers of Shakespeare, living and dead, from Ben Jonson, Michael Drayton, and Milton down to Matthew Arnold and our own contemporaries, even though his contribution to the poet's praise be no more than a little note in a private diary. His journey will open a fresh field of literary research, if he be not already a student of Elizabethan literature. He will be enrolled on the long and unexhausted list of pilgrims to the shrine of the country's greatest poet, the man whose thoughts have lost nothing of their depth and beauty in the slow passage of three eventful centuries.

CHAPTER II

THE POET'S YOUTH

In these days, when biographies of nobody in particular are as the sand upon the seashore for multitude, and the demand for personal paragraphs is seemingly well-nigh as great as the supply, we have some occasion to regret the absence of similar craving in the spacious times of Queen Elizabeth. If there had been a daily, weekly, or monthly publication that submitted famous men to the ordeal of the interview, we might pardon the glut of our latter day. Unhappily for our desire to know what manner of man Shakespeare was, the available records are exceedingly scanty, or are at least insufficient for our legitimate needs, and we are face to face with the initial difficulty that in the sixteenth century Shakespeare's name was quite common. From Cumberland down to Warwickshire there was probably no county in which a William Shakespeare could not have been found for the searching, and this fact is accountable for many curious mistakes that have been made by students and biographers. In Warwickshire alone there were more than a score of families bearing the surname in the sixteenth century, and half as many again in the following century, when

the name was one to conjure with. The poet's father, John Shakespeare, who was a native of Snitterfield and moved to Stratford in the middle of the sixteenth century, to carry on what would seem to have been the business of a big store-keeper, applied for a right to bear arms towards the century's close, and made certain claims on behalf of ancestors. But the opinion of competent critics is that John Shakespeare was as capable of drawing the long-bow as he was of selling general stores, and that he was closely connected, from a mental standpoint, with the successful tradesmen of our day who, having proved fortunate business men, seek to confer upon themselves such advantage as a dubious pedigree may assure. We cannot, then, accept the version of his family history that satisfied the complaisant Heralds' College.

The chief difference between our modern Arms-seekers and John Shakespeare is that they are moneyed tradesmen and he was not. The early days of his commercial career were comparatively prosperous, and he found time to serve the borough of Stratford in many offices, including those of ale-taster, burgess, petty constable, borough chamberlain, and chief alderman. He married Mary Arden of Wilmcote near Stratford, the marriage taking place in Wilmcote's parish church at Aston Clinton, and William was the third child of the union. The poet's registration in the parish records at Stratford is dated April 26, 1564. The place of his birth is generally assumed to be the house in Henley Street purchased by John

Shakespeare a year before his marriage, and we are told that he was born in a certain room on the first floor. Here again contemporary criticism may make some people regret the loss of the sixpence that was demanded before the scene of the birth could be surveyed; but, after all, there is much saving grace in a tradition, and whether the place be all it is alleged to be or less, little harm is done. Suffice it that thousands, gifted with faith and sixpences, have visited the room, ceilings and windows bear countless traces of the desire that besets the most commonplace people to deface walls with their uninteresting names. Shakespeare's alleged birthplace is a charming little residence enough, with dormered roof and penthouse entrance, and sixpence is a small price to pay for a pleasant illusion.

In the very early days of the poet's life the *res angusta domi* had not yet begun to trouble his father, who was appointed Bailiff of the Stratford Corporation in 1568, and Chief Alderman three years later. In 1575 he bought a house in Henley Street, and no less an authority than Dr. Sidney Lee, whose researches command the respect of all, believes that this house is the one in which the poet is now said to have been born. It would seem that John Shakespeare's prosperity received a rude shock soon after the date of their purchase, for in 1578 and 1579 he was mortgaging his wife's property at Wilmcote and Snitterfield, and gradually the once wealthy man fell from power and place. Creditors pursued him, and he lost his standing in the Corporation.

In the meantime William was receiving his early training at Stratford Grammar School, and picked up more than a smattering of French and Latin, with perhaps a little Italian as well. That his school life or home life was closely associated with Bible reading and study is proved by the readiness with which he turns to Scripture for graphic and concise expression of a thought, or for the purpose of an apt comparison. But he was destined to learn in a larger and rougher school than that of King Edward's foundation at Stratford. His leisure came to an abrupt end when he had just entered his teens and his father told him to look after one of his failing businesses. So the brightest genius of English poetry became, while yet a boy, a butcher or a butcher's assistant, and for some four or five years passed an uneventful life in Stratford under conditions that might well have coarsened and spoilt him. Happily the exquisite surroundings of the little town, and his own response to them, made a somewhat sordid occupation possible; but of his daily life and steady growth in the most impressionable period of his career no reliable details have reached us.

To his associates in the old Warwickshire home he was no more than the clever, precocious eldest son of an alderman who had seen better days. He went his own way, and may be supposed to have lived a somewhat free life, for before he was nineteen he appears to have found himself compelled to marry one Anne Hathaway of Shottery in the parish of Old Stratford. Her father had died rather more than a year before her marriage;

she was twenty-six years of age, and had inherited by will a sum amounting in the currency of the day to a little less than £7, rather more than £50 of our money. The marriage would seem to have been hurried and irregular, and though it may have followed a formal and binding betrothal of a kind that had more sanction then than now, the poet's first child—his daughter Susanna—was born less than six months later. It was not a fortunate union. Twins were born to William and Anne Shakespeare in 1585, and then all record of the home life closes for a long period. Some of Shakespeare's biographers think that the poet had run away to London before the year closed, and that for more than a decade he did not return to the town without taking care that his presence should not be noticed. We do not know how strained his marital relations had become, but we may assume that his home was not a happy one, for in the early days of his union he ran risks that most young married men would avoid for the sake of wife and family.

It seems clear that the story of his poaching expeditions in Charlecote or Fulbroke Parks is not a mere legend unsupported by facts. Sir Thomas Lucy, the owner of Charlecote Park, was of course a game preserver, and Shakespeare must have thought that poaching was a reasonable pastime enough. He dared "do all that may become a man," and the penalty of exciting the wrath of a great landowner and game preserver was no less then than now. Sir Thomas was angry; the poet is said to have written a vulgar, bitter

ANNE HATHAWAY'S COTTAGE—INTERIOR

lampoon, still preserved, and affixed a copy to the gates of Charlecote. The response was a persecution that made Stratford too hot to hold a greater man than all the big sportsmen from Nimrod's day to ours, and William Shakespeare left wife and children and vanished from the old town's ken. Some think he lived in neighbouring towns or villages awhile, and found work as a schoolmaster. There was an idea that he went for a time as a soldier to the Low Countries under the Earl of Leicester, whose splendid pageants in honour of a visit from Queen Elizabeth may have inspired some of the fantasy of "A Midsummer Night's Dream."

Doubtless there was a Shakespeare or two in Lord Leicester's regiment; the name was a common one enough; but it was no part of the poet's experience "to trail a pike in Flanders." Directly or indirectly, he was on the high road to London, and Sir Thomas Lucy was to find his claim to immortality in the pursuit of a young poacher and in the poacher's creation of Mr. Justice Shallow of Gloucestershire, whose foolishness, suggested in "Henry IV." (Part II., Act iii. sc. 2), is still further emphasised in the "Merry Wives of Windsor," where he figures as one who has come to make a Star Chamber matter out of Sir John Falstaff's poaching. His complaint will be remembered. "Knight, you have beaten my men, killed my deer, and broken open my lodge . . . the council shall know this."

There has been no lack of determined effort among the poet's countless biographers to give the lie direct to every story that does not cast credit upon his youth.

Because he was a great man, many people require his history to be written in a fashion that shall lessen, ignore, or deny his weaknesses. There can be no valid reason for pursuing such a course, for we know that the rule of art is not the rule of morals, and that while a very good poet may be a very bad man, a very worthy man may be a vile poet. The apologists have picked out the finest moral thoughts in the plays and poems and declared that he who could conceive them could not have been less than a saint. They might as well pick out the countless villains of the tragedies and declare that he who presented them must have been a sinner. Truth to tell, the question is one of no importance. Shakespeare was in some respects a man like the majority of men; in other regards he stands alone. Only in this latter aspect have we any occasion to consider him. We have neither the right, the capacity, nor the data by which to sit in judgment; but it is hardly honest to withhold reports, that seem to be well founded, because they do not flatter the youthful career of a great man. In his own "Henry IV." and "Henry V." Shakespeare shows how the recklessness of youth is not incompatible with sound living and a high standard of morality and common sense in the days of responsibility.

CHAPTER III

NATURE ROUND STRATFORD AND SHOTTERY

We find Shakespeare, just out of his teens, travelling on the road to London, and it is worth while to see what equipment and what resources he is taking to the metropolis. It is safe to assume that he has no money, and that his local reputation is not one of the very best, though the worst to be urged against him is that he has loved not wisely but too well—and this fault has not been too clearly substantiated—and that he has ignored the game laws, as so many men had done before, have done since, and will do as long as these laws exist.

The early life of a truly imaginative man had been passed in the most beautiful surroundings that rural England can provide, and by reason, perhaps, of the lack of restrictions, had helped him to enlarge his experiences and develop all the facets of a luminous mind. The expression is chosen deliberately. Man's mind is like a diamond, and experience is the lapidary. Every action, every stroke of good fortune or of bad, leaves its definite mark; every association does the same. As a boy Shakespeare lived in close touch with Nature. His father's business would have brought him

into contact with farmers, given him the freedom of their fields, taught him the significance of the seasons. Even now, when glimpses of Elizabethan England are few and far between, we are touched by the supreme peace that still broods over land on which the old-time houses, with their thatched roofs or well-worn tiles, their ingle nooks, their dormer windows, their oak rafters and their many gables, tell of a time when the jerry-builder was not and the suburban villa had not yet come into being. It was an age of beauty, and the walks round Stratford remain beautiful to this hour, despite the growth of villadom and the advent of the railway line.

We can follow the roads that Shakespeare knew, to the woods of his poaching exploits, and the meadows over which he passed to thatched, half-timbered Shottery, where the village inn was still standing when men, now middle-aged, were born. Rustic gardens, white-blossomed orchards, tiny brooks beloved by the kingfisher, trees that may have seen the courting of the poet and his wife, still remain to tell the story of England's unchanging charm. In the spring and early summer there is such an atmosphere about the countryside as George Meredith has created in his "Richard Feverel" when Richard and Lucy meet in "the very spring-tide of their youth." Doubtless there are other regions in plenty, scattered through the length and breadth of our fascinating English country, wherein the attractions are hardly less than here; but Shakespeare's genius has hallowed Stratford for us, because

MARY ARDEN'S COTTAGE

that particular countryside made him a poet and sent him to London, full of such inspiration as has not fallen to any other Englishman even in times when the literary activity of the age has been at its highest point.

It may be suggested in passing that much of the early romance associated with Anne Hathaway's cottage is spurious, and the worthy people who tell of the poet's courtship there overlook the fact that his relations with his wife were clandestine and his marriage almost a secret union. But the cottage itself is beautiful enough to account for the enthusiastic departure from the path of truth, if not to justify it.

Lying on the left as you come out of Stratford to Shottery, past the post-office, to the "Bell Inn," where the road has crossed a stream, we see the cottage, and, *horribile dictu!* a row of modern brick-built cottages for background! Long, thatched and creeper-covered, built upon slabs of stone, with timber and plaster above, with tiny windows under the thatch, surrounded by a well-filled and carefully tended garden, the place makes a quick and enduring appeal to the imagination, even though the legends associated with it are, for the most part, legends and nothing more. It is easy to realise the supreme beauty of the scene that Shakespeare knew, to understand how the lovers' secret meetings were made all the more memorable by reason of their surroundings. The scene and the associations went to the making of the poet; they were among the treasures he carried up to London when he was compelled to

leave Stratford behind him and time and distance were smoothing all the little troubles that had beset his short and uneventful life. He must have heard Stratford and Shottery calling to him in the heart of the town, for when his name was made and his future assured, he came back to home, wife, and little ones to enjoy the "poor remains" of life.

On his road to and from Shottery, he would have passed "under the shade of melancholy boughs" and watched the "guest of summer, the Temple-haunting martlet," that built under the eaves of Anne Hathaway's house. Doubtless to his mood of elation or depression, and to his quick and intimate response to the wild life round him, we owe those clear impressions that connect certain scenes and phases of our life with his more familiar utterances. To hear the cuckoo and the nightingale to-day in the woods round Shottery and Wilmcote is to recall some of the poet's most inspired moods. But it is not the familiar birds alone that caught the poet's eye and stimulated his imagination. In the days of his youth, before he went to London, he must have studied bird life closely and accurately. Nearly fifty wild birds find mention in his plays and poems, and for the most part they are birds he would not have seen in London, though in his day the metropolis was small enough, and the outer London of his time was well-nigh as wild and wooded as the least frequented parts of Warwickshire to-day. The halcyon or kingfisher, the white-breasted water-ouzel, the skylark, the "ruddock" or robin-

redbreast, the wren, the green plover, the woodcock—these serve for some of his moods; but he mentions eagle, kite, hawk, buzzard, owl, falcon, cormorant, and a number of others, always with discretion and with the full measure of knowledge vouchsafed to his time. Classical lore and country superstitions are sometimes found in his references, but the most of them point to the poet's own loving observation at a time when there was no widespread interest in birds or beasts, unless they had a part to play in hunting. Shakespeare's references to the chase are accurate and suggest first-hand observation, coupled with the keen instincts of the sportsman, and it is easy to see that the extraordinary receptivity of his mind enabled him to take impressions from every aspect of life.

CHAPTER IV

FIRST DAYS IN LONDON

THREE hundred and twenty-four years have passed since William Shakespeare set out to prove his fortune in London, and in those far-away days that his genius makes so real for us the journey was long and at times dangerous. Three days would suffice in fine summer weather, while four or five might be required in winter time, when rivers were swollen and fords were dangerous. Not only were roads bad, but bridges were conspicuous by their absence. To send a letter from Stratford to London and receive a reply to it would occupy nearly a fortnight, and if, as some writers believe, Shakespeare had already made a certain name by his skilled handling of other men's work when touring companies came to his town, it is quite clear that his best chance of establishing himself as a playwright would be found in the metropolis. Even if he had not found trouble in his native place, he could not hope to thrive there. It is thought that he travelled to town on foot by way of Oxford and High Wycombe, and that once in the metropolis he sought a friend of the family, one Richard Field of Stratford, who had left Warwickshire seven years before, and after serving

THE EARL OF SOUTHAMPTON

In the National Portrait Gallery

To Mail

his apprenticeship to a printer, had set up an office of his own in Blackfriars.

It is possible that he owed his introduction to the world of the London theatre to Field, and that at one of the only two houses in the metropolis, "The Theatre" in Shoreditch or "The Curtain" in Moorfields, he served for a time in a very humble capacity, looking after the horses of the men of fashion who rode to the play. The keen relish with which he deals with the moods and thoughts of ostlers, stable-boys, and the lower classes that frequented the stable and the theatre, lends a certain countenance to the legend. A year later, when his friend Field had been admitted a member of the Stationers' Company, Shakespeare found his employment inside one of the two theatres—probably the house in Shoreditch; some writers have said that his first work there was that of a call-boy. It is certain, at least, that his apprenticeship was a hard one, and that in those early days his contributions to the support of the Warwickshire home must have been few and scanty.

When Shakespeare came to town there were some half-dozen companies of licensed actors, that is to say, companies that enjoyed and exercised their rights under an Act of Parliament (14 Eliz. c. 2). It said that all actors, save those who held the licence of a peer of the realm or other person of importance, were to be treated as rogues and vagabonds. The company to which Shakespeare was admitted derived its rights from the Earl of Leicester, and soon after he joined, if not

before, it passed under the support of the Earl of Derby, and in later years under the supreme patronage of King James I., whose admiration for the poet and his works was very large and real. James Burbage was owner of "The Theatre," and it was in his time, we may presume, that Shakespeare acted as ostler and call-boy. But he must have risen up from the ranks at no small pace when his gifts became well known, for not only do we find him a regular member of the company, but a friend of the leading members, men like Richard Burbage, son of the proprietor, and Augustus Phillips. And at "The Theatre" in Shoreditch he won some fame as a playwright, though it was not at "The Theatre" but at "The Rose," a new house on the Bankside at Southwark, that the poet's genius was to "blossom and bud and fill the face of the world with fruit."

The close of the sixteenth century was a season of considerable activity among actors; the destruction of the "galleons of Spain" had relieved the country of a very real danger. Some of the leading companies amalgamated for a time when in town; new houses were springing up. In addition to "The Rose" there was one at Newington Butts, and in 1599 the Burbages transplanted "The Theatre" to Bankside and called it "The Globe." Here Shakespeare did the most of his work and made the most of his reputation, acquiring considerable wealth the while.

James Burbage built the Blackfriars Theatre, to which Shakespeare brought his company shortly

before he retired to Stratford. He gradually acquired certain interests in the theatres, so his profits were not only those of actor and playwright. The wealth that was to be his was drawn from three sources.

CHAPTER V

SHAKESPEARE'S LONDON

Of the landmarks that Shakespeare knew, the Great Fire of London destroyed many, and Time, dealing in rather gentler fashion, has effaced the most of those that the fire spared. A map made by Peter Van den Keere in 1593 shows us the old London Bridge, with the Church of St. Saviour's, then known as "St. Marye Overyes," facing the river on the Southwark side. This church, which would have been well known to the poet, is, with the exception of Westminster Abbey, the only ancient example of pure Gothic architecture in London. Its earliest name would have been St. Mary Over Rye, rye being perhaps the old name for ferry. When it was built there could have been no London Bridge, and St. Mary's was built upon the site of a still older priory founded by two Norman knights. In this church one finds a stone in the centre aisle marked "Edmond Shakespeare. Died December 1607."

This marks the mortal remains of a brother of the poet, said by some to have been concerned with the business side of his undertakings, and certainly his companion in London for some time. In St. Mary Over Rye or St. Saviour's, King James I. of Scotland

ANNE HATHAWAY'S COTTAGE

was married; here the poet Gower, with whose works Shakespeare was undoubtedly familiar, was buried, and his monument is a fine one with many inscriptions, including one that describes him as "Anglorum Poeta celeberrimus." Beyond "St. Marye Overyes" on Van den Keere's map one sees the famous "Bears House," and below that the "Play House," and beyond this the town merges into gardens stretching up to "Lambeth Marsh." Across the river we see "More Feyldes" and "Spittlefeyldes," big open spaces, and then Islington, but there is no sign of another theatre. Had the worthy cartographer known what was to give his map an abiding interest three centuries after its making, he would doubtless have given more thought to the playhouses.

To-day the Church of St. Saviour's stands well-nigh smothered by factories, shops, and small houses. London, a muddy stream, has overflown its banks and spread on that side far into regions where birds and beasts of the chase flew or ran in the poet's day. Tradition tells us that the Thames sometimes rose above its boundaries and flooded the graveyard of St. Mary's, and in like fashion the town itself has spread beyond all limits, until the south side, within a very restricted area, holds more than all London held in the poet's day. Doubtless the old church fared better at the hands of the river than the town does now, for three hundred years ago the hands of Father Thames were clean; the river still ran sparkling under London Bridge, then a comparatively low structure,

with houses on either side of it, like the Ponte Vecchio in Florence.

Shakespeare's London held about a quarter of a million souls, on generous computation, and it is said that about 15 per cent. of the number found employment and their means of livelihood on the river. The writ of the civic authorities did not run on the south side of the Thames, and it is to this that we owe the existence of so many houses of amusement in Southwark. Nor were they the only ones to be placed for choice beyond the eye of authority. The river Thames brought foreigners by the thousand to London, adventurers from all lands, men who said with ancient Pistol, "The world's my oyster, that I with sword will open." London held dangerous riverside slums.

Many associations whose members were banded together for protection against the lawful authorities throve on the south side of the Thames, and the numbers increased as the years went past. It is a fascinating chapter in London's life, this organised revolt against ever-growing authority, but one with which in this place there is no lawful occasion to deal at length. We know that when Shakespeare had settled in the metropolis he lived for a time in Southwark, near the "Bears House" marked on the map to which reference has been made. But he is also assessed as the owner of property in St. Helen's, Bishopgate, where a window given by some anonymous lover of the poet to St. Helen's Church records the association. It is likely that Shakespeare in his acting days took part in some

of the plays given in the yard of the "Bull Inn," then the most important hostelry in Bishopgate Street. Old "Crosby Hall," the subject of such a prolonged discussion in the press a year or so back, was in Bishopgate Street, and Shakespeare lays one of the scenes there in his "Richard III." The poet's activity unites Southwark with St. Helen's, though in his day the distance between the two must have been regarded as considerable.

Many attempts have been made to find out what manner of life the poet lived in London, but the material for a reliable opinion is quite wanting. Some have imagined that he was a free liver and roysterer, after the fashion of his time, that he lived as Robert Greene and Christopher Marlowe and other dissipated writers. There is no more authority for such a suggestion than there is for the statements on the other side telling us that William Shakespeare was the personification of every virtue. We simply do not know; there is no record extant. We grope with dim eyes through the London of Shakespeare's time, glad to find any trace of his presence in some favoured spot, and content to make it a place of pilgrimage for his sake. It is to the history of the stage itself that we must turn in order to piece together some fragmentary record of his life in a city so changed by time and prosperity that if the poet could revisit the glimpses of the moon, and were to be set down in Bishopgate or Southwark to-day, he would not know where to turn, and the metropolis of which we are so proud would be no more to him than "the monstrous fabric of a vision."

CHAPTER VI

THE STAGE IN SHAKESPEARE'S DAY

When Shakespeare was at work the women of the plays were represented by men or boys. In the highest society the Elizabethan women might take some part in masques or pageants without rebuke, but the appearance of a woman on the public stage in Shakespeare's day would have aroused something like the emotion that would be caused by the appearance of a Moslem woman unveiled in the chief thoroughfare of a fanatical Mohammedan city, or a suffragist in the House of Commons. Costumes were those of the day. Just as the great painters of Italy dressed the heroes and heroines of Bible story in the contemporary costume, so the actor of Shakespeare's time did no more than wear the best Elizabethan clothes he could assume. Scenery was unknown. The front curtain, opening in the middle, revealed a bare stage with perhaps a balcony at the back. This was sometimes used by the actors, but where the play did not require a balcony, visitors to the play would find their places there, just as at the Queen's Hall, when a piano or violin recital is given, the orchestra is sometimes added to the auditorium. A trumpet flourish warned playgoers that the curtain

GUILD CHAPEL AND SCHOOL

was about to rise, and between the acts a small company of musicians helped the interval to pass.

It was not until the celebrated Inigo Jones designed scenery for certain masques given at the Court of King James that the traditional bareness of the boards was covered, and it was not until the time of Charles II. that women began to make their appearance upon the boards and unite the stage with the second estate. Many writers have emphasised the difficulties besetting the Elizabethan dramatist; Sir Philip Sidney himself has apologised to the spectator for the heavy overdraft on his imagination, and we have but to consider some of the most striking moments in our poet's work to realise what they must have lost under the Elizabethan tradition. How could bare boards conjure up a vision of Juliet's garden, of the wood "outside Athens" in which Titania and Oberon met, of Prospero's island, of the Forest of Arden? How could any boy, however smoothly spoken, present a Rosalind, a Juliet, a Miranda, or Cordelia? While we wonder at these things, it is well to remember that to those who have never eaten wheat, acorns may prove very satisfactory fare. The tradition of the theatre being so strictly circumscribed, nobody could imagine anything better than bare boards, boy heroines, and modern costumes. There are many sound judges of stage matters to-day who are very strongly of the opinion that we have travelled too far in the opposite direction, that by reason of costly mounting, extravagant costumes, alluring music, and the rest, we are no longer able to maintain that "the

play's the thing." Doubtless the need for the finest possible expression of thought, and the knowledge that his words must carry the full burden of success, stimulated not only Shakespeare, but every dramatist of the great Elizabethan age.

There was one special advantage attaching to the limitation of stage equipment—touring was a simple matter. When we remember that three or even four days were required to travel on horseback from London to Stratford-on-Avon, owing to the bad tracks that enjoyed the courtesy title of roads, and the fords that must be crossed out of flood time, it is easy to see that no part of the cumbersome equipment of the modern stage could have been taken far out of London without vast and unremunerative labour. But the Elizabethan actor travelled light, and as soon as the fine weather came he would leave London for the country, and tour in all manner of unexpected places until autumn warned him home, because it was no longer possible to pass from town to town.

To turn up the old touring list of the Elizabethan companies is to find special attention given to towns of which no town is on the first touring list to-day. Saffron Walden (the quaint market-town in Essex, that opposed the coming of the Great Eastern Railway, and is now served by a little branch line), Rye in Sussex (then probably a seaport of some dimensions), Marlborough, Coventry, Oxford, Faversham, Hythe, Bath, New Romney, Folkestone—here are some of the cities or towns that the touring companies delighted to honour

in the best season of the year. There is ample evidence to show that some companies crossed the border into Scotland, and that others went still farther afield—to France, Germany, Austria, and other countries. Probably these companies were sent abroad by their patrons and supporters, and were consequently assured of a hearing and adequate remuneration. It is hardly probable that the conditions of continental travel would have been favourable enough, or the security for life and property great enough, to tempt even third-rate English actors oversea unless they had a definite programme and an assured welcome.

Some have thought that Shakespeare in his acting days travelled on the Continent, or at least into Scotland, but modern expert opinion does not accept the suggestion; it rather inclines to the belief that the poet did no more than make a small provincial tour. As far as the Continent is concerned, his quaint ideas of French pronunciation and European geography should do much to settle the question with regard to these countries. His references to Denmark in "Hamlet" are no more than he could have founded on a brief chat with actors who had been there. Then, again, the period of his active and sole association with the actor's profession was brief; he soon became playwright and manager as well, too busy to stir far beyond the boundaries of London until the time came when he could enjoy his brief period of well-earned ease. Dr. Sidney Lee says that the name of Shakespeare does not appear in any known list of the actors who travelled

from England between 1580 and 1630, a period more than sufficient to cover the debatable years. Against this must be set the fact that the name appears in certain records of the town of Aberdeen as that of a member of a travelling company visiting the city in the period covered by Dr. Lee's investigations.

Despite an infinity of research, the figure of William Shakespeare in London remains very dim. He is reputed to have been a good actor; but Richard Burbage the tragedian and William Kemp the comedian were greater actors than he. He played with them before Queen Elizabeth at Greenwich Palace, in a couple of scenes designed to celebrate Christmas. We are told that he took the part of the Ghost in a performance of his own "Hamlet" and the part of old Adam in "As You Like It." These very brief glimpses into his life as an actor are the more unsatisfactory because he remained a player long after he had achieved greatness as a playwright. When he left the boards it was to return to Stratford-on-Avon and live the retired life. It may be taken for granted, then, that his talents as an actor were not in any way extraordinary, or those who witnessed his rising fame as a dramatist would have left some record of his other work. His advice to the players in "Hamlet" is often and justly quoted in evidence of the attention he had given to the theory of the acting art, but there is evidence to be found in the Sonnets to show that he did not admire himself as an actor. Some very recent re-

HOLY TRINITY CHURCH AND THE AVON—STRATFORD

search in the Record Office shows that the poet lodged with a family of French Huguenots named Mountjoy, at the corner of Monkwell Street and Silver Street, in the City of London, where a public-house called the Coopers' Arms now stands.

As far as we can tell, the poet had been five years in London before he started upon his life-work, and he entered the arena of the playwright at the age of twenty-seven. His methods were his own. The stories and legends that other men had set down, often crudely, in form of chronicle, or even of a play, he melted in the crucible of his own brain and gave back in a new and beautiful form. The play can be traced to its source, whether that source be a *novellino* of Masuccio, or Holinshed's "Chronicles," or Plutarch's Lives in North's translation, from which some passages are copied *in extenso*. The poet himself would seem to have had but little consciousness of the worth of his own work. In his time plays were not published. Publication was supposed to destroy the playgoer's interest in the work presented, and many Elizabethan plays owe their survival to the happy accident that enabled some unscrupulous person to collect a set of the actors' parts and print them, in order either to dispose of the acting rights for private use, or to derive the ordinary profits of the sale. When a play was written for and bought by a manager, it became his absolute property. He could request the author to rewrite or modify passages deemed ineffective; he could even call in another man to tinker the work,

unrestrained and unrebuked. It is supposed that Shakespeare first showed his great parts as a dramatist in improving other men's work for Manager Burbage, and that this constant exercise of talent upon reproductions, the most of which are absolutely unknown to us, paved the way for the development of his gift upon original or quasi-original work.

CHAPTER VII

SHAKESPEARE'S EARLY PLAYS

THE poet is credited with the authorship of some thirty-seven plays, though modern criticism has endeavoured to show that he took but a small part in the making of a few of these, and of the whole thirty-seven little more than a dozen were published during his life. It is supposed that his first play was the comedy "Love's Labour's Lost," in which he would appear to have gone to his own brain for the plot. Here we find a certain broad outlook upon contemporary life, with many a passing reference to matters of topical interest, while vivid recollections of life in Warwickshire among slow-witted rustics account for some of the humorous episodes. Historians can trace many of the references in the play, which is supposed to have been written in 1591, five years after the author left Stratford, revised in 1597, and published a year later. Cuthbert Burbie, who, like Shakespeare's earliest London friend, Richard Field, was a member of the Stationers' Company, was the publisher, and the printer was one William White of "Cow Lane near Holborn Conduit."

"The Two Gentlemen of Verona" came next,

adapted from a Spanish source, and not published until the author was dead.

"The Comedy of Errors" is borrowed from Plautus; and then came "Romeo and Juliet," founded upon a *novellino* by Masuccio, who had taken the story from the Greek. It has served for many countries, but nowhere has the plot found such a magical handling as Shakespeare gave it. There is internal evidence to suggest 1591 or 1592 as the date, and Shakespeare was still a young man then, on the sunny side of thirty, and with the currents of his life no longer turned awry. There is here a ring of confidence and enthusiasm that three centuries have proved powerless to dull. After due revision, the play was printed in 1597 by John Danter, a publisher of rather evil repute. Two years later Burbie published an authorised edition.

Oddly enough, the success of "Romeo and Juliet" would appear to have been eclipsed by that of "King Henry VI." The events set out in the trilogy were sufficiently familiar to the people to give the work an interest that is almost fictitious. Criticism has shown that the poet's part in these productions was but small. Some say that Greene and Peele were the authors of the plays, that Shakespeare rewrote them perhaps with a little aid from Marlowe. Certain it is that Greene attacked the poet furiously when the remodelled work was produced, calling upon his brother dramatists of repute to beware of upstart puppets and "rude groomes." But Shakespeare was serenely unmoved by these abusive epithets, for which Greene's publisher

BEN JONSON

From Painting in the National Portrait Gallery

apologised later. He was in the historical vein, and proceeded to write "Richard III.," in which Richard Burbage is said to have made a great sensation; the following play was "Richard II.," and the poet was clearly responsive to the influence of Marlowe in each of these works.

Shortly after "Richard II." was written and produced the plague visited London, and the poet sought the country. He may have written a small part, a very small part, of the "Titus Andronicus," and after that he picked the stage Jew of Marlowe and the rest out of the gutter, and gave the world in "The Merchant of Venice" a figure that commands keen interest not untouched with sympathy. "King John," bearing date 1594, is another piece of inimitable adaptation. By this time the "Venus and Adonis" had been published with a dedication to the third Earl of Southampton, and the poet followed it a year later with "The Rape of Lucrece," dedicated to the same patron.

These works created a sensation. Shakespeare the actor was already a familiar figure, Shakespeare the dramatist was known and admired, but Shakespeare the poet seems to have taken literary London by surprise. It is hard to say why, for there are passages in the plays he had already written that challenge comparison with anything in the poems; but praise from the great Elizabethans was not to be lightly won, and no poet could have sought to wear a worthier garland than theirs. Shakespeare was admitted at once to the most select circles. Queen Elizabeth

became his patron. Greenwich, Whitehall, and Richmond Palaces witnessed performances of his plays, with their author taking some small part in them. "The Palace of Nonsuch," a private purchase of Queen Elizabeth's situated near Richmond, may still be seen in old prints—a charming place enough. The palace at Greenwich, coming right up to the banks of the Thames, is also to be seen in old prints, and it says all that is needed for the state of Father Thames in the poet's time that a royal palace could be lapped by our great river below London Bridge.

Shakespeare's capacity for writing makes us realise that the quantity was almost as remarkable as the worth. He wrote his plays at the rate of two in a year, with his work as manager and actor thrown in, and his poems as a thing apart. The quality of "Venus and Adonis" and "The Rape of Lucrece" brought him into the company of the country's great sonneteers; he was inspired to give attention to the sonnet form and made it one of the vehicles for the expression of his most beautiful thoughts. The most were written about the year with which we are now dealing, 1594. In accordance with the custom of the time, they were not printed immediately, but were written by the poet and given to his friends. But by this time the interest aroused by new work from Shakespeare's pen extended throughout literary circles, and the sonnets must have been copied and quoted extensively before they were published by a literary pirate named Thorpe in 1609.

The dedication of these sonnets to "Mr. W. H."

has roused an enormous controversy, into which there is no need to venture far, as it lies outside the scope of a brief biography. It should never be forgotten that the sonnet in the days of Elizabeth was a form overladen with the conceits of many countries, and that few men would have regarded seriously the sentiments to which they committed themselves. Suffice it that many of the sonnets are of a haunting loveliness that defies praise, and gives to the best-intentioned expressions of admiration a quality of impertinence. If for W. H. we read H. W. and forget the prefix "Mr.," the troubles that have agitated generations of critics are seen to evaporate. H. W. would become Henry Wriothesley, third Earl of Southampton, to whom in the sonnets constant references occur. A pirated edition might well have been handled either carelessly or with a view to suggesting what could not be said openly.

Next in order of the plays we come to that exquisite fantasy "A Midsummer Night's Dream," in which we find references to Shakespeare's supreme patron, Queen Elizabeth, and to the pageants he had seen as a little lad when the Earl of Leicester entertained Queen Elizabeth at Kenilworth (1575). In 1595 or 1596 came "All's Well that Ends Well," taken from an Italian source, and "The Taming of the Shrew," with an introduction dealing boldly with the Stratford country and some of its worthies, contemporaries of the poet. In the two-part play of "Henry IV." that followed we have further references to Shake-

speare's birthplace, and he introduces us to Mr. Justice Shallow, who was to come into prominence again in the "Merry Wives of Windsor." Clearly the dramatist was closely concerned at this period of his life with certain happenings in the place of his birth. These references help us, in place of authenticated records, to show that Shakespeare still kept in fairly close touch with his early home. "Henry IV." is famous for its scenes in the Boar's Head at Eastcheap, and lest the enumeration of plays should become a little tiresome, let us turn aside for a brief space to consider the taverns of Queen Elizabeth's day and the company to be met in them.

CHARLECOTE HALL

CHAPTER VIII

THE ELIZABETHAN TAVERNS

THE London taverns were the clubs of London's literary men, and in Shakespeare's time the most famous houses were "The Mermaid" in Bread Street, "The Boar's Head" in Eastcheap, "The Devil" at Temple Bar, "The Falcon," "The Tabard," "The George," and some few others, situated on the south side of the river. In the days when he lived by the river-side at Southwark, Shakespeare would have counted among the members of his tavern club Edmund Spenser, Beaumont, Fletcher, and Ben Jonson, "rare Ben Jonson," who wrote of his great rival, "I loved the man, and do honour his memory on this side idolatry as much as any"; tribute over which the mind loves to linger. Fuller tells of the contests of wit that used to ensue when Shakespeare and Ben Jonson met, "which two I beheld like a great Spanish galleon and an English man-of-war. Master Jonson, like the former, was built far higher in learning, solid, but slow in his performances; Shakespeare, with the English man-of-war, lesser in bulk, but lighter in sailing, could turn with all tides, tack about and take advantage of all winds by the quickness of his wit

and invention." We see in this simile that the lesson of the Spanish Armada had not been forgotten, and that its appearance was still vividly present in men's minds.

Although the taverns were open to all comers, it was easy for small companies of men, banded together by common interests and devoted to similar aims, to keep aloof from casual patrons. Strangers who had no literary interests would not find any excuse for intrusion, and the landlord, proud of the special patronage of those who claimed respect outside the tavern, would doubtless grant them such privileges as the house afforded. At a time when the news of the day was brought to the taverns, while men of affairs and those who had some *locus standi* at Court did not disdain the attractions of a favoured house, there must have been a certain high standard of conversation, and many a friendly battle of wits. The ready tongue and fluent pen might make a mark in the tavern and all London hear of it. Ben Jonson established the Apollo room at the "Devil Tavern" by Temple Bar and drew up his famous "Convivial Laws," which, while granting admittance to "learned, urbane merry goodfellows" and "choice women," forbade horseplay, and concluded "focus perennis esto."

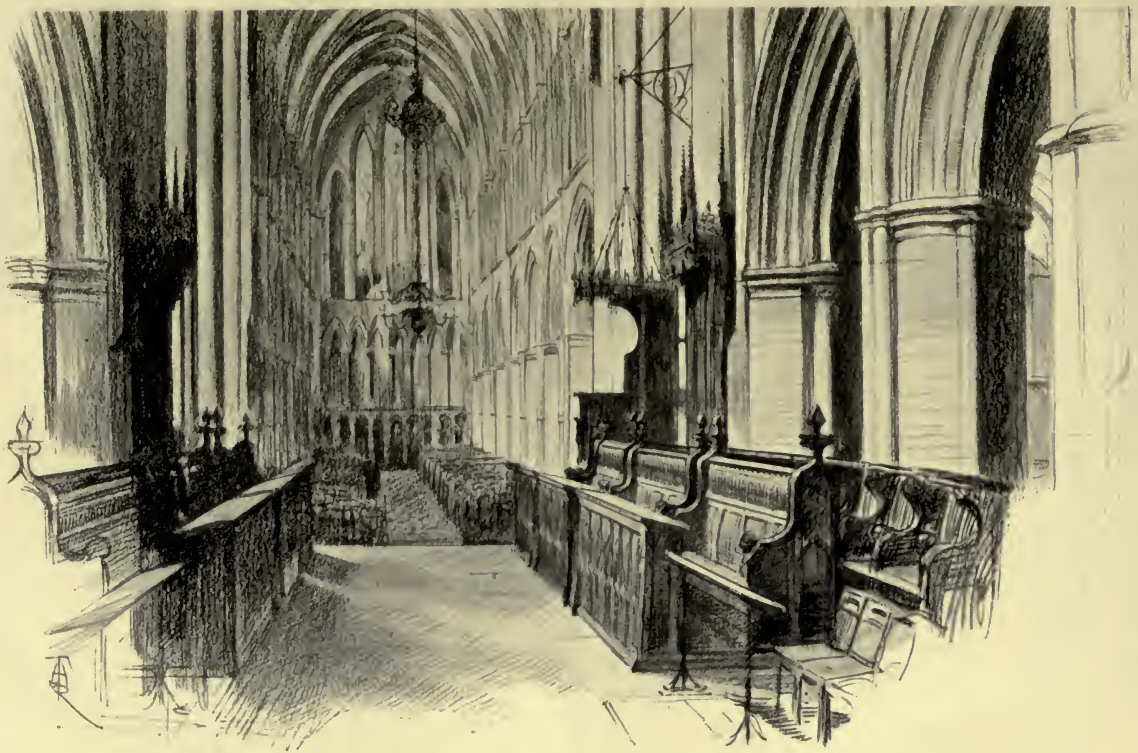
Sir Walter Raleigh founded a club at the "Mermaid Tavern," where, in addition to Shakespeare and Ben Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, together with many other dramatists of note, spent their leisure hours. In Southwark the "Tabard Inn" enjoyed the fame con-

ferred upon it by Geoffrey Chaucer, as well as the additional honour of his patronage, before Shakespeare arrived. "The Bell," "The George," and "The White Hart" were among the "Tabard's" leading competitors; it is likely that the poet knew them all. We have no record that he spent too much time in taverns, as poor Ben Jonson did; but he knew them well enough to enter into the spirit of those who served and those who gave orders, those who paid promptly, and those who could say with Ancient Pistol, "Base is the slave that pays."

Some of Shakespeare's biographers, who, because of their own virtues, would abolish cakes and ale and forbid ginger to be hot in the mouth, resent the mere suggestion that Shakespeare used the taverns as his contemporaries did. There is no reason to suppose that he misused them after the fashion of Robert Greene, Marlowe, and Ben Jonson, but at the same time the temperance advocate will need to go very carefully through plays and poems if he is searching for praise of water as opposed to wine. The power of the Puritan was rising in Shakespeare's time, but the Puritans did not number the poet among their supporters. A certain spirit of conviviality marked the Elizabethan age, which enjoyed, among other advantages, the benefit of wine and spirits that had not been systematically adulterated. Then again, no playwright could remain wholly indifferent to the taverns, for it was in the yards of the inns that the drama was first nourished. The inn yard was to some extent the forerunner of the theatre. When the companies left London in the summer and

went on tour, they found no small part of their audience in the country hostelries. The place of the tavern in literary history has not yet been written. From the "Tabard" of Chaucer to the "Mermaid" of Shakespeare, through the coffee-houses of a later date, to the "Bohemia" of Soho, where the free-lances of literature meet to-day, there is a thread of connection well worth examining.

Our ubiquitous press tends to restrict the feast of reason and the flow of soul; men do not care to express themselves too freely, or the cleverest may wake one morning to find he has made some silent auditor famous. A very notorious case of this kind occurred in the last decade of the nineteenth century. But in Shakespeare's time wit seemed to receive its guinea stamp from the tavern, and we have the records of many men to show that when Shakespeare was one of the company the audience had good reason to be content. There are many tributes to the standard of the conversation. Beaumont, the dramatist, Francis Meres, the clergyman schoolmaster, Richard Barnfield, the poet, Michael Drayton, the intimate friend, all testify on behalf of Shakespeare; and there are many others who must have seen and heard him. The attraction of the tavern must have been increased to a great extent when their patrons stood a chance of catching the crumbs that fell from the wit's table. "To give you total reckoning of it," says Erle, "it is the busy man's recreation, the idle man's business, the melancholy man's sanctuary, the stranger's welcome, the inns a court man's entertainment, the



INTERIOR OF ST. SAVIOUR'S AT SOUTHWARK

(Edmund Shakespeare's Burial-place)

scholar's kindness, and the citizen's courtesy. It is the study of sparkling wits, and a cup of canary their book, whence we leave them."

All have passed—the spacious taverns, those who served, and those who patronised them have gone, never to return. Where great writers and poets assembled and marked the arrival of travellers from the country, and listened to stories of "nine men in buckram," where the horseman saw to the ease of his weary nag before his own, we see crowded thoroughfares in which the pulse of traffic beats furiously for six long days out of seven. Of the many changes London has known in the three centuries that have passed since Shakespeare's time few have been more drastic. Perhaps the Great Fire destroyed many of the taverns; the growth of commerce and the coming of new means of locomotion did the rest. Only in old prints may we find some pleasing recollection of red-tiled or thatched houses with half timber and half plaster walls, their ingle nooks, dormer windows, or many gables. Here the men to whom we still pay tribute spent their hours of ease, unconscious that their lightest words would be sought for eagerly in generations to come—and be sought in vain. But the knowledge that the old houses had their being, and that the great poets of the Elizabethan era frequented them, hallows many a dusty, dingy street in the city's by-ways now given over to feverish activity from dawn to dusk, and to silence from dusk to dawn.

CHAPTER IX

THE MIDDLE PERIOD

TURNING again to the plays, there is reason to believe that "The Merry Wives of Windsor" followed "Henry IV." The character of Falstaff, first known as Oldcastle, had taken the town, but the name had been changed at the instance of the eighth Lord Cobham, a descendant of the great Lollard, Sir John Oldcastle. Falstaff's humour made ample atonement for his faults, and the desire to improve his acquaintance is said by several authorities to have been expressed by Queen Elizabeth herself. We are told that her Majesty requested the poet to present the fat knight in love, and that he obeyed instructions in a few weeks. There is no mistaking the high spirits in which the work is written; they are still ringing through every line. The poet remembered the old days of Sir Thomas Lucy of Charlecote, and gave the knight's arms to Mr. Justice Shallow openly and unrebuked. Under the ægis of royalty, he could afford to let himself go and hit back at the astonished game-preserver. "The Merry Wives" was no more to its author than a merry jest, made in fulfilment of a royal request, a payment of long-standing scores in the best humour possible, and as soon as it was off his hands

the poet turned to another historical subject and wrote "Henry V."

With the close of "Henry V." Shakespeare left the arena of English history, never to enter it again on his own initiative; for, as will be seen, his share in "Henry VIII." was small. Comedy was for the moment in his heart. Perhaps it was a relief to him, after the strenuous time he had passed through, to pass to his lighter muse and express himself in the brightest vein that could not bear misinterpretation. He turned to an Italian author, probably Ariosto, for a part of "Much Ado about Nothing," but he drew the least vital part from the foreign source; the most of the comedy ran sparkling from his own brain. "As You Like It" followed "Much Ado," and the date must be about 1600. It is another clear case of adaptation, and the scenes of the play given to the Forest of Arden breathe the pastoral spirit in a fashion that we look for in vain elsewhere. "Twelfth Night" would appear to have been the third comedy following the sequence of historical plays, and the date would seem to be 1601.

About this time the poet found himself in a very delicate situation. He had referred to the expedition of the Earl of Essex in terms of eulogy, and when that enterprise failed, Essex revolted against his sovereign, aided and abetted by the poet's patron, the Earl of Southampton. Part of the preliminary arrangements for the conspiracy consisted in arranging for performances of Shakespeare's "Richard II.," in which, of course, the king is murdered, the object being to show

that regicide was of no very distant date. Shakespeare's company was persuaded to revive the play at the "Globe" just before the abortive rising in favour of Essex, who, having lost his head metaphorically, was now to lose it literally. Happily for England, Shakespeare himself was not involved in the trouble. Oddly enough, he published in the year of Essex's death and Southampton's imprisonment a curious poem, "The Phœnix and the Turtle." Nobody has been able to fathom its meaning, though it may be that those who connect it with the Essex *débâcle* may yet find a clue to the mystery.

After this year even comedy would seem to have lost its appeal and savour for a time. The poet had received a shock that we cannot quite estimate or understand, and turning to Plutarch's Lives for inspiration, he wrote the famous tragedy "Julius Cæsar," in many respects a work that must always defy adequate representation on the stage. How it could have passed muster on the bare Elizabethan boards is a puzzle. Next in order came the masterpiece by which his name is known to the widest circle of his followers, "Hamlet," yet another adaptation of a work that had enjoyed popularity for some years in London and the country. There are many references in Shakespeare's "Hamlet" to contemporary events, including the triumph of the company of boy actors known as "The Children of the Chapel," who in a few years had advanced in popular favour, and were now threatening the receipts of the established houses and companies.

THE FIRST GLOBE THEATRE

History repeats itself. Then as now there was a demand for novelty, sensation, and the infant prodigy was in demand. In "Hamlet," too, Shakespeare shows that technical knowledge of his art to which reference has been made earlier in this little survey. Richard Burbage was the first Hamlet, and the tragedy was played in Shakespeare's time both at Oxford and Cambridge.

Dr. Sidney Lee, than whom no greater authority is needed, is inclined to set "Troilus and Cressida" next in the list of plays, and to give it date 1603. Some hold that the play hides a satire upon some of the poet's contemporaries, but there is insufficient evidence to justify the rather laboured conclusions that uphold the contention, which at least is of no more than momentary interest. It is easy to find, and difficult to deny, these hidden meanings in the work of one who left no clue to any suggestion or satire embodied in his plays.

CHAPTER X

THE LATEST PLAYS

At this point in Shakespeare's career he lost his first royal patron, Queen Elizabeth, whose long and fateful reign drew to its appointed close on March 24, 1603. The poet gave to the world no expression of grief at her loss. Perhaps he could not do so in loyalty to his first and well-beloved patron, Henry Wriothesley, who still languished in prison for his complicity in the Essex rising of two years before. There had been times in his career when, through no fault of his own, Shakespeare had been looked upon with suspicion, and it may have been that the path to royal patronage had been at times a thorny and difficult one. In any case Elizabeth's generosity had been limited; she had not intervened to check the attack upon the theatres by the "unco guid" of London in 1601, when, but for the supineness of the Surrey and Middlesex magistrates, the poet's financial prosperity might have met with a serious set-back. Here, as in so many other places, we are too far from the time to see the truth clearly, and those who seek to fill in the shadowy outline of the poet's life must rely upon such conjecture as may have been put forward in good faith by the people who were

nearer to him. King James loved the theatre; Queen Elizabeth tolerated it; nor must it be forgotten that in the days when the poet's star was in the ascendant his royal mistress had seen the greater glories of her reign and was entering upon her declining years, not without many troubles and much sorrow to mark the last milestones of the road.

One of the first acts of King James's reign was to confer special rights upon the Lord Chamberlain's company, of which the poet was a prominent member. Henceforward he was one of "The King's Servants," and the King took a special interest in Shakespeare's plays, which were often performed before him. Unhappily the plague drove the Court from London in the autumn of 1603 to the Earl of Pembroke's seat at Wilton; but in 1604, when the Court returned to London, Shakespeare was first of the nine actors who walked in the royal procession, and received a gift of scarlet cloth for the making of a cloak worthy the occasion. Many other honours followed. Great State occasions called for plays; Shakespeare's were chosen, and his company acted them. The scenic art began to receive a rather belated attention—in short, there was all the requisite stimulus for a man of genius, and the poet responded to it nobly.

"Othello" was the first play written by Shakespeare in the reign of King James, but he seems to have had "Measure for Measure" on the stocks at the same time, for each was produced at Whitehall towards the close of 1604. "Macbeth," written in 1605 and 1606,

was clearly intended as a compliment to the king, who was a descendant of the unfortunate Banquo whose royal line Macbeth saw "stretch to the crack of doom." Dr. Lee makes the shrewd suggestion that inasmuch as this is the shortest of Shakespeare's tragedies, we may have no more than an abbreviated acting version. Other critics of note find certain corrupt passages in the text that go far to justify this contention. We may be sure that Shakespeare, then at the zenith of his power, would not have stinted the measure of a work which seems to have taken more of his time than any previous play. Following closely upon "Macbeth" came "King Lear," produced at Whitehall for the Christmas festivities of 1606, and founded, like several of its predecessors, upon Holinshed's Chronicles.

After this supreme effort the pace of genius faltered for a while. "Timon of Athens" and "Pericles" are not pure Shakespeare; they do not show us the master at his best—though the first named is fine enough to have given enduring reputation to a lesser man. The question of his collaboration is a difficult one to settle, but leading critics have picked out the gold and rejected the dross, and their analyses prove that Shakespeare's part in these works was not predominant.

It is no function of a simple record like the present to inquire into this critical question closely; a dozen editions of Shakespeare's plays published in the last ten years set down the latest researches of scholars. To

MICHAEL DRAYTON

In the National Portrait Gallery. (Painter unknown)

not a few of us the tragedy that followed "Pericles" is among the finest of all that carry Shakespeare's name; surely, in some passages of sheer undying beauty, "Antony and Cleopatra" stands well-nigh alone. It dates from 1608, and, like "Coriolanus," the play that followed (1609), is taken largely from Plutarch (North's translation). "Cymbeline" is founded on Holinshed, and probably may be dated 1610. "The Winter's Tale" belongs to 1611, and to this year may be assigned the poet's moderate part in "Henry VIII." —he is far from being responsible for the whole play. "The Tempest" belongs, at latest, to 1612. This, the latest and last work of the master-hand, was given with all its beautiful songs set to music by Robert Johnson, a player and composer of renown.

So, leaving Miranda and Prospero to console us, the greatest dramatist of all time laid down his pen. Many a critic and lover of the poet has seen in the last words of Prospero, spoken when he gives up his magic wand, a reflection of the poet's mind. His life-work, too, was done. Unaided, save by his own genius, he had moved from the obscurity of Warwickshire's by-ways to a place by the side of the Immortals. In all the firmament of poetry there was no star to outshine his. It may be he knew that the years still left to him were likely to be few, and that his heart turned more from the bustle of a great city's ways to the quiet fields and lanes wherein his earliest inspiration had come to him. He had written a few scenes of plays that other men would seem to have designed

and completed, but these fragments are of small importance and may be passed over here. Whatever he had given to lend a lustre to the work of his contemporaries would seem to have afforded him little concern. Henceforward his life was to be spent far from the busy centre of theatrical life, though he was compelled to come to town at short intervals in the first two or three years following his retirement, and there must have been ample atonement for the trouble, in the way of association with old friends who still laboured in the metropolis.

When the poet passed into voluntary retirement he had but five years to live, but his genius was still ripe. Did he elect deliberately to end his labours before the first touch of weakness could reach them? Had he realised his ambition, even as Prospero, who moves with such supreme dignity through the last play? Was he content to have restored the family fortunes? Was it to do this, to take full rank among the gentlemen of Warwickshire, that he had striven so long? There is no satisfactory answer to these questions. The records are silent as the grave itself, and if the past has proved so silent on all points that relate to the growth and trend of the poet's mind outside the domain of his work, what may we hope from the future?

CHAPTER XI

BACK AGAIN IN STRATFORD

In the foregoing review of the poet's life-work, the progress of his fortunes on the material side has been of necessity overlooked. It would have been confusing to deal with the two interests side by side, and now it is time to look for the signs that mark William Shakespeare's prosperity. We know that he came to London poor and left it comparatively wealthy, and the change of his state has some very definite landmarks. No man passes easily from the duties of an ostler to the position of part proprietor of prosperous theatres, and the first few years of Shakespeare's sojourn in the metropolis bore but little fruit. We know that in those lean times his own purse would have been but ill-lined, and both his father's household and his own were suffering from the pinch of poverty. His wife was forced to borrow money; his father's affairs went steadily from bad to worse. Nor was there in all Stratford any help for a family that had fallen from comparative affluence into the slough of financial troubles.

We may presume, from the scanty evidence which records have left and diligent scholarship has dis-

covered, that the poet himself made no effort to "fling away ambition." In the early years of his sojourn in London, when visits to Stratford were few and far between and the fear of the Squire of Charlecote may have compelled him to lie very low within the boundaries of Warwickshire, he would have seen or heard of his father's affairs going from bad to worse. The parental honours were stripped off one by one, debts accumulated, duns were incessant in their attendance. To a proud and sensitive man this condition of things must needs have been very galling; but it was not destined to last long. Quite apart from his considerable receipts as a playwright, the poet's earnings as an actor were substantial. The purchasing value of a sovereign in Elizabeth's time would be equal to the value of nearly eight pounds of our money, and Shakespeare's most learned biographers are of opinion that he was a careful and a saving man. Member of a leading company, enjoying the patronage of noblemen and the regard of his Sovereign, frequently summoned to take part in special performances at Court, it is likely that the poet's income as an actor was, within comparatively few years of the start of his career, equal in our modern currency to a sum nearer a thousand than five hundred a year. In later years it was still higher. For revising other men's work his fees would have varied between thirty and forty pounds, modern currency, and for his own plays he may well have averaged twice as much, or even more. The "benefit" system was already in vogue, and a dramatist

could command an extra fee if the first-night audience proved very appreciative of his efforts. Shakespeare wrote his plays at the rate of two a year, and he would have had something in the way of a royalty on the sale of his poems, even though the plays brought him nothing as published work. We may presume, then, that after a year or two he was able to maintain his wife and children with some approach to comfort, and as the years passed and reputation grew he found himself able to revisit his birthplace in security, and to take definite steps to re-establish the family fortunes, then at so low an ebb.

We read that after 1596, when the poet returned to Stratford with London's honours thick upon him and plenty of money in his purse, his father's debts were no longer the subject of proceedings at the local court. We may presume, then, that his son had paid them and cleared the way for John Shakespeare's strange application to the College of Heralds for a coat of arms. Strange at first thought, but less remarkable if, as is generally supposed, the father was acting for the son. It was and is the custom for a coat of arms to be applied for by the eldest male of the house, and the poet could not have made application in his father's lifetime. The application may have received some initial support in London, for arms were assigned with the least possible delay. Garter King-of-Arms referred to certain (and probably apocryphal) services rendered "to that most prudent prince King Henry the Seventh of famous memory," and stated, without any recorded

blush, that the Shakespeare family had continued since those days to live in Warwickshire, in good reputation and credit! He went on to record the undoubted fact that the applicant had married Mary Arden, daughter and heiress of Robert Arden of Wilmcote, who is described as a gentleman. In view of these qualifications, arms were assigned to the applicant, a shield described in the quaint jargon of heraldry, "Gold, on a bend sable, a spear of the first, and for crest or cognizance a falcon, his wings displayed argent standing on a wreath of his colours, supporting a spear gold steeled as aforesaid." The motto chosen was "Non Sans Droict."

But though the grant was assigned, the assignment was not completed for three years, the claim to relationship with the Ardens of Park Hall, through John Shakespeare's wife, being disallowed, as was indeed inevitable. Even then the grant was criticised in many quarters, but William Shakespeare's eminence tended to render all criticism nugatory; nor was he the first eminent actor to enjoy a coat of arms. It is quite easy to understand the significance of the application if we turn to regard the poet as a purchaser of real estate. Some two years before the assignment was completed, he had impressed upon his fellow townsmen of Stratford the truth that the period of strained finances had passed.

New Place, the century-old seat of Sir Hugh Clopton, a man who had done much for Stratford, his birthplace, and had thriven in London, was now dis-

mantled and in bad repair; but remained the most imposing house in the town. It was on the market, and William Shakespeare bought it, with outbuildings and garden, for the equivalent of about four hundred and fifty pounds, a large sum in that place and in those days. Some years passed before the transaction was completed, and then the poet planted an orchard which contained a famous mulberry tree, that flourished for more than a hundred and fifty years, and was cut down by the Rev. Francis Gastrell, whose name and memory are anathema to lovers of Shakespeare. The poet did not take up his residence at New Place until he had retired from London, and by that time the repairs were completed and the place was in good order. It is at least highly probable that the poet conducted some farming operations in and round New Place, though we know nothing of his special qualifications for this work. There is a record that in time of a local famine he had a good store of corn, and he is known to have bought several lots of arable land. From the date of the purchase of New Place there could have been none to dispute the poet's claim to the description of William Shakespeare of Stratford, Gentleman, and from first to last the total amount of his purchases of real estate in and round his native town would amount to more than £7000 modern currency, if we value the Elizabethan pound at eight times our own.

At the corner of Chapel Street, Stratford, where it turns into Chapel Lane, there is an ugly modern house

that enjoys the title of New Place and receives the sixpences of the faithful. The trustees of Shakespeare's birthplace own New Place and Anne Hathaway's cottage. The house in which Shakespeare passed his last years does not exist, but there is not a little about Stratford that calls for sixpences more readily than it can justify the receipt of them. All that New Place can offer of true Shakespearian interest is some venerable timbers, a shovel board, from the old Falcon Inn that rose close by soon after Shakespeare's death and still stands in receipt of custom, a circular table inlaid with wood from the mulberry tree that the poet is said to have planted, and a stone mullion from his own house. There is little else that can recall the past, although the site of the ancient Clopton mansion that Shakespeare purchased is undeniably here. The history of the house that has passed and that of its successors has a very definite interest.

Shakespeare left New Place to his favourite daughter, Susanna, and to her daughter, Elizabeth Nash, in second marriage Lady Barnard. On her death Sir John Barnard kept the place as a residence until he sold it to Sir Edward Walker, whose daughter Barbara married Sir John Clopton, descendant of the man who built the first house at the end of the fifteenth century. Sir John pulled down the old house, rebuilt it, and was succeeded by Sir Hugh Clopton. From him in an evil hour it passed into the hands of a clerical Vandal, Francis Gastrell by name. He was a wealthy man and mean, so he quarrelled with the Stratford rating autho-

rities, who assessed him too heavily, or so he said, for the relief of the poor. He had already cut down the great mulberry tree in the garden, because his privacy was disturbed by the early pilgrims to the poet's shrine, and for this act alone his name was an offence to the lads of Stratford, who broke his windows when opportunity afforded. But the town had not finished with the reverend gentleman. When the assessors refused to listen to his claim that he should not pay full rates to Stratford because he resided for a part of the year at Lichfield, he vowed that New Place should never be assessed again. He pulled the place down. Boswell described the cutting down of the mulberry tree as a piece of "Gothic barbarity," but was silent about the other act of vandalism. The mulberry, sold for firewood, was bought by a local clockmaker, who made solemn affidavit that the toys he made of it were from the genuine sacred tree. When the Rev. Mr. Gastrell had gone to where he may have met the poet, though this is unlikely, his widow sold the remains of the estate to a Mr. Wm. Hunt, who in time sold it to a firm of bankers. In 1827 Miss Smith purchased the site of New Place with the adjacent house, now the museum. Mr. Edward Leyton and his daughter, Mrs. Loggin, were the next holders, and in 1861 Mr. J. O. Halliwell Phillipps, an enthusiastic student of the poet's history, established the existing Trust after raising the necessary money by public subscription. But as far as New Place, so called, is concerned, it must be remarked, with deference to those whom the reminder may offend,

that the Falcon Hotel, which can be seen from the house, is the older establishment by centuries—indeed the billiard-room is panelled with some of the old oak from the New Place that Shakespeare knew. New Place Museum is really the house adjoining Shakespeare's, and was the property of Thomas Nash, first husband of Elizabeth, daughter of Susanna Hall.

Shortly after his purchase of New Place, the poet found himself in a better position than ever for increasing his property and gratifying his passion for real estate. Richard and Cuthbert Burbage, sons of that James Burbage who owned "The Theatre" in which the poet is said to have been a servitor, had built the "Globe Theatre" on Bankside. It was an octagonal wooden building, in which Shakespeare's company was to be seen year after year; the poet refers to it in the opening part of "Henry V." The two brothers, from motives of prudence or generosity or both issued twenty-one-year leases of shares in the profits of the venture. Shakespeare had a share; so had Condell and Phillips and others of the company; and later the poet acquired an interest in the "Blackfriar's Theatre." Each share was proved, in the course of long subsequent litigation, to have been worth two hundred pounds a year. Setting down the poet's salary at a like amount, and his author's fees at about a hundred, we find that he must have been worth nearly £4000 a year, in our modern currency, from the time when he bought New Place to the year of his retirement. "The Globe" was burnt down in 1613 during a performance of

"Henry VIII.," and was rebuilt a year later, but before the disaster occurred Shakespeare's financial position had long been assured, and it is unlikely that he held his shares when the theatre suffered. There is a story, unauthenticated but seemingly credited by many good judges, to the effect that at a moment when Shakespeare was desirous of making investments either in Stratford or London, his friend and patron Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, came very generously to his assistance.

CHAPTER XII

THE POET'S DOMESTIC LIFE

In 1601 John Shakespeare's arduous life came to an end. Fifty years had passed since he left Snitterfield for Stratford, to venture into several business undertakings with temporary success, and achieve municipal honours for a few years. His decline had been more rapid than his rise, and, but for his son's success, his ending had been less peaceful. As far as we can tell, the last four or five years were free from grave financial trouble, but when he died the houses in Henley Street were the sole remains of his fortune; the rest had passed to creditors. These William Shakespeare inherited as eldest son—he let one, and left his mother in peaceful enjoyment of the other. In the following year he made more purchases, rather more than one hundred acres of farm-land at three pounds per acre—a price that would be quite good to-day if we consider the relative values of money—and a cottage with garden on the boundary of the New Place grounds. In 1605 he bought the unexpired term of a long lease of half the tithes of Stratford, Old Stratford, Bishopton, and Welcombe, the price being £440, which may be taken to stand for more than £3000 of our money, and a

THE MERMAID INN

considerable part of a full year's income in his most prosperous time. It was an unfortunate investment, and one which led to his frequent recourse to the lawyers. Shakespeare's knowledge of the law has often puzzled his biographers, and the correctness of his phraseology has been advanced by upholders of the grotesque Baconian heresy as one of the reasons why he could not have written the plays attributed to him. But it is impossible for the plain man to follow the arguments that the Baconians adduce and affect to support.

In later years the poet bought another twenty acres of arable land to add to his already considerable holding. All these purchases were made while he was a very busy man—actor, playwright, and manager. Doubtless he had other investments and interests, of which we may some day know a little more than we do now. Fresh documents relating to his investments in the theatrical world were published as recently as the closing months of 1909, and the records of the reign of Elizabeth and James I. are by no means fully examined. One truth stands out clearly through the interesting story of Shakespeare's investments, and that is his love for the town in which he was born. With so large a share of the world to choose from, with countless associations that might well have kept him in the neighbourhood of the metropolis, with friends in Court circles and acting circles who would scarcely be accessible in a town three, four, or even five days' journey from London, he seems to have had the fixed intent of spending his years of ease at home. There is too

much reason to believe that with him marriage was a failure. Reference has been made already to the birth of his daughter Susanna, who became Mrs. Hall, and we know that in 1585 his wife bore twins, boy and girl, Hamnet and Judith, named after Hamnet and Judith Sadler, friends of John Shakespeare. But the poet saw little of his family or of the three children of his union, and at the time of his public return to Stratford little Hamnet Shakespeare died, in his twelfth year. Susanna married, in 1607, the Puritan physician John Hall. Judith the twin married Mr. Thomas Quiney in the year of her father's death. The poet seems to have lived on excellent terms with his daughters, but there must be some justification for the generally accepted story of unhappy married life. Had he been devoted to his wife, Shakespeare could have sent for her when he had been a very few years in London; the fact that he did not go back to her for eleven years has a significance that takes a great deal of explaining away, nor are the laboured explanations of the people who assume that the life of genius is perfect, worth the ink and paper devoted to them. The estrangement might have been the fault of the man, or his wife, or both; it is a matter that ceased to be important when one or both had died. We make our conjectures and pass on; others come to do the same; but the first is likely to be as far from the truth as the last. We do not find any reliable information that can clear the darkness enshrouding the poet's life; even Aubrey's "Lives of Eminent Men," in which the poet is described as "hand-

some and well shaped," was written more than fifty years after his death, and was founded upon the gossip of an old actor.

There is hardly more than one portrait that may be supposed to show the poet as he was. This was discovered by Mr. Edgar Flower in 1892; it is painted on an elm panel, with "Wm. Shakespeare, 1609," in the left-hand corner. Several leading authorities have agreed that it may be the original from which Martin Droeshout engraved his half-length portrait for the folio of 1623, a likeness that was accepted as satisfactory by Ben Jonson, though it was clearly a second-hand work, because the engraver was no more than fifteen when Shakespeare died. The portrait is now in the Memorial Gallery at Stratford. Dr. Sidney Lee, in his fascinating "Life of William Shakespeare," a work that has run into many editions, tells us that upwards of sixty portraits of Shakespeare have been offered to the National Gallery since 1856, and that not one of these has been shown to be authentic. How fortunate, then, that the deeds and signatures quite beyond suspicion have told the world so much about the business side of the poet's life. Just as the forgery of portraits has been of common occurrence, so the forgery of deeds has been a source of amusement, if not of profit, to many; but happily there is always a strong critical faculty waiting to deal with startling discoveries, and those that survive the sifting of the keen intellects that examine them may be accepted in perfect good faith.

We have the safe material upon which to base the conclusion that the poet left Stratford penniless, or well-nigh penniless, in 1585; that after eleven years of hard work in London, in the course of which he probably paid brief visits to his home, travelling by way of Oxford and stopping at the Crown Inn, he returned to restore the family fortunes and build up his own estate. We know that he bought the best house in the town, that he planted an orchard, developed his gardens, and made extensive purchase of farm-lands, some years before he could hope to settle down in comfort to their enjoyment. It may be that the knowledge that the new home was ready for him helped to put a period to the London labours. He did not give any sign of appreciating the full significance of his own work, or appear to know that he had made a position that placed him side by side with Geoffrey Chaucer in merit, and still higher in world renown. He never pushed the advantages that a connection at Court and the favour of King James might have given him—he was only too pleased to retire, "the world forgetting, by the world forgot," while he was yet on the sunny side of fifty. Man of affairs sufficiently to seek the law-courts on the smallest provocation, idealist to the extent of preferring a simple country life to all the glamour of London, a man seemingly endowed with all the ambitions of the most sober and unimaginative middle class—truly he presents strange and baffling contrasts.

In the absence of direct evidence to the contrary,

we may presume that Shakespeare retired from the actor's profession in 1611, on or before the completion of "The Tempest," into the closing act of which he would seem to have put a reflection of his own inmost thought. Of all the rich and varied emotions to which such a mind must have responded, there could have been none more stirring than the thought that his life-work had brought the reward he most desired. To the town from which he had fled as an outcast he was returning a man of substance and repute; to the failing fortunes of those he had left behind he had become a sure support. Father, mother, one brother, Edmund, and the little son Hamnet had gone before him "to that bourn from which no traveller returns," but there were two loving daughters and a granddaughter waiting to welcome him home, one sister, Joan, and two brothers, Gilbert and Richard. There was Michael Drayton, author of the "Shepherd's Garland," the man after his own heart, to whose charming sonnets he was indebted for some of the beauty of his own, and it may be that some of his old companions of the stage could be lured to New Place in the intervals of their touring. For one who knew as well as Shakespeare the changes and uncertainties of life, there must have been a keen consciousness that balance of fortune was in his favour when he rode out from London on to the Oxford-Stratford road, only to return to look after his vested interests as occasion should demand.

The poet would appear to have taken an active part in developing the prosperity of his native town, and

to have found in that work sufficient consolation, if any was needed, for his absence from the scenes of greater activity. In 1611, the year of his retirement, he supported with his purse and influence a Bill before Parliament for the better repair of the highways. He had suffered first-hand acquaintance with their wretched state. Doubtless he took part in much unrecorded work for the betterment of his own estate, and he was frequently found indulging in his undeniable passion for litigation. The purchase of a house in Blackfriars is recorded in 1613, and it led to the seemingly inevitable lawsuit some two years later. Nicholas Rowe, poet-laureate to King George I., wrote a life of Shakespeare in the early years of the eighteenth century, and we owe to him a statement, founded upon such information as a lapse of a century could validate, that Shakespeare spent the last years of his life enjoying "ease, retirement, and the conversation of his friends." We know that Michael Drayton and Ben Jonson visited him at New Place, and it is a tradition that their visits were celebrated in convivial fashion. At the same time there would have been certain restraints upon a very free life, even had the poet been disposed to lead one. Society in small country towns is notoriously inclined to be intolerant, and Shakespeare's son-in-law, Dr. Hall, was one of the great and growing body of Puritans that looked askance at sensual indulgence in any form. Moreover, there was a strong feeling against the stage in Stratford; it found expression only a year after Shakespeare's return, when the

Town Council passed a resolution that stage plays were unlawful, and increased the penalties to which players might be subjected. It would be a matter of great interest to know how Shakespeare regarded a resolution that so wantonly decried the profession by which he had lived and thriven. There is no evidence to show that the action of the city fathers was symptomatic of any ill-will towards him, or that he resented it openly. Yet he was a man who could and would stand up for his rights in and out of season. Perhaps in the most of his moods he was gentle and affectionate, for more than once in his career we find his friends leaving him small legacies or gifts or tokens of their affection. These came alike from actors who had shared with him the traffic of the stage, and from fellow-townsmen of Stratford. Even if the recorded references are scanty enough, there is none that may be held unflattering if we except the attack by Greene, for which his publisher went out of his way to apologise. It is hard, if not impossible, to estimate the value of any form of art-work in the lifetime of the worker, and it may well be that of the thousands who applauded Shakespeare's plays there were very few who saw them as we do to-day. The mere fact that they were for the most part new versions of works that were then quite familiar to playgoers would have told against them. Theme rather than treatment was best calculated to "tickle the groundlings."

CHAPTER XIII

STRATFORD AS IT WAS

STRATFORD in Shakespeare's time administered its own affairs in very complete fashion through the medium of a Guild, which was turned into a Municipal Corporation by Edward VI. It boasted bailiff, aldermen, burgesses and chamberlains, and the council met every month in the Guild Hall. Those who accepted office were liable to be heavily mulcted for non-attendance, for attending in mufti, for declining promotion to a more responsible office, or for telling the secrets of the council chamber to those who had no place in it. The Chapel of the Guild, the Guild Hall, and the Grammar School, in which boys were taught and disciplined in fashion that would shock our humanitarian instincts to-day, still exist. The bailiff or warden of Stratford was at one time John Shakespeare himself, and at another a subordinate colleague, who would have sat in judgment upon him in the days when the old man's liabilities were beginning to get the better of his assets, and he himself was no longer a man of importance. The rule of the City Guild or Corporation was paternal in an Elizabethan sense. Just as the schoolmaster did

SHAKESPEARE'S HOUSE—STRATFORD-ON-AVON

not spare the rod lest he should spoil the child, so the magnates of the corporation regarded their fellow-citizens as men and women to be admonished or encouraged, punished or praised, according to their behaviour. Food prices were fixed by the corporation; the adulteration of the people's supplies was made exceedingly difficult and dangerous. Men who lived ill were fined or expelled from Stratford's boundaries; scolding wives were sentenced to have their tempers sweetened by immersion from the ducking-stool in the clear, cold waters of Avon. Publicans were forced to conform to the local laws carefully framed to abolish public drunkenness. The stocks were waiting for the feet of drunkards, brawlers, and offenders against municipal regulations, and the whipping-post was always in evidence where the Market House now stands. Apprentices might not be out after nine o'clock at night. Attendance at church was obligatory, and he who blasphemed or used foul language found ample reason to regret his indiscretion. In short, the conduct of Stratford was of a kind more in keeping with the Puritan tradition than anything we can find in England to-day, but it was associated with real brotherly love, and a feeling of common citizenship, that held the town together. Those who have studied the early records of the Spanish and Portuguese Jewish community in England in the years following the successful intercession of Manasseh ben Israel with Oliver Cromwell, will hardly fail to note the striking similarity between the rules that governed

Elizabethan corporations and those that governed those Jews who returned to England and lived their prosperous but dignified lives in the east end of London when the eighteenth century was as young as our own.

There was much to hold communities together in Elizabeth's time, much to encourage strength of purpose and resignation to troubles that were regarded as the manifestation of Divine Will, though in truth they were fruits of the people's ignorance. Unfortunately there was no real attempt to control them. Sanitation was unknown. The ground floors of the houses were of hard clay, covered with rushes; chimneys were not common. Refuse and garbage were placed in the open roads, not always in the special places appointed by the corporation. Pigs were kept close to the houses, and though the butchers were supposed to take the refuse of the slaughter-houses beyond the town, a strong wind would doubtless bring back infection. The corporation kept certain public places clean, and doubtless the citizens, or the most of them, did their best; but they had no knowledge of the price of uncleanliness, and in a town that was unpaved, undrained, and seldom cleaned, microbes must have enjoyed their life under conditions only familiar to those of us who have travelled through some of the remote cities of Africa and Asia, and known what it is to be literally unable to dismount from a horse. Street lighting was in its early infancy. In Shakespeare's time every man of substance was compelled to hang a lighted lantern outside his house

from dusk to curfew, during a few weeks of mid-winter, and that was all.

Of all these defects the lack of cleanliness was the vital one, and the consequences of the neglect or ignorance of the first laws of sanitation may be imagined. Plague was never far away. Every few years there would be a visitation, mild or severe, and there was no effective remedy known to the people. As in the time of the great plague of London, herbs and cooling drinks were employed, fresh air was in demand, and there was much burning of spices. Shakespeare was a baby in arms when a visitation of the plague gave nearly fifteen per cent. of the town's population to the graveyard or its substitute, the plague pit.

Now and again the Avon would overflow its banks and flood the surrounding country. Not only would such a disaster increase the ague and rheumatism that are never far removed from dwellers by the river-side, but a late summer flood might damage the crops on low-lying lands, or carry away corn that had been cut but not carted, and then, as Stratford was not readily accessible, the prices of food stuff would rise despite the corporation's efforts, and actual famine was not unknown.

Fires, too, were common. Doubtless a few arose from the overheating of corn in barns and stacks, and some from the absence of chimneys to so many houses. The corporation did what it could, but there were no resources adequate to deal with a conflagration, for all

that the Avon ran at the foot of the town. They came to the conclusion in 1582 that the absence of chimneys was a fruitful source of disaster, and ordered every householder to build one. They also ordered every burgess to provide himself with a bucket. Looking back to the times, it is not easy to say that the corporation of Stratford was really backward; its members did all that the people of a little town in the heart of Warwickshire could have been expected to do, and there would seem to have been no lack of public spirit, no falling away from continuous endeavour, no shirking of onerous duties. Every man had his work to do in the public service, and those who failed were punished.

When we look round at our busy manufacturing towns in this year of grace, and remember how much we know of the best tradition of municipal work, can we say that, *mutatis mutandis*, the advantage is altogether with us? Plague and fire and flood have been overcome, but men and women live lives entirely undisciplined. Little or nothing binds the citizen to the State, and the adulteration of food has become so common that pure bread and pure beer are the exception, and the supervision of those who prepare the necessities of our daily life is much less strict than it was when old John Shakespeare, the poet's father, was Stratford's ale-taster, empowered to see, *inter alia*, that every baker sold a whole loaf of true weight for one penny.

But if the corporation ruled Stratford strictly in

Elizabethan times, it encouraged all kinds of sport, to some of which the poet makes reference in his plays. Young and old knew the Maypole. Nine Men's Morris was another popular game, and Falstaff, referring to his treatment when he escaped from Ford's house disguised as the fat woman of Brentford, says, "Since I plucked geese, played truant, and whipp'd top, I knew not what it was to be beaten, since lately." Goose-plucking was a particularly barbarous pastime. We know that hockey and football were played in Elizabethan England, and that the corporation of Stratford kept a bowling-alley at the municipality's expense for the free use of the town. Cock-fights were among the less reputable sports of the time, and bears or bulls were baited. Hunting, hawking, coursing, fishing, and the rest beguiled the leisure hours of those who had any, and the harvest festivals would have played their part. There were great fairs and open markets held at certain seasons of spring and summer. Within doors, cards and shovel-board would seem to have been the only kind of amusement that were not directly associated with social ceremonies.

Christening, marriage, and burial were all allied in the poet's time to more public exhibitions than obtain to-day, the wedding being preceded by a public betrothal ceremony, and the marriage itself being associated with a great many quaint customs if the contracting parties had the money wherewith to carry them out. Removed from touch with the

outside world, seeing little of the life of big cities for themselves, the citizens of Stratford managed to get no small measure of simple and harmless enjoyment out of life, though even among the town council there were men whose liking for sack and good ale was notorious.

Players from London brought some added amusement in the summer, but as Stratford grew more and more puritanical, a very deliberate effort, already referred to in the preceding chapter, was made to penalise actors, and some years after Shakespeare's death it is recorded that the king's players were bribed by the corporation to leave the town without giving any performances. The gardens of Stratford were very productive. They were separated from each other by mud walls, and were carefully cultivated. Shakespeare delighted in his gardens and his plays speak of his sound knowledge of the gardener's craft. People who could afford to plant orchards took a pride in doing so; the poorer folk generally boasted a few fruit-trees, and gave no small part of their garden plot to raising herbs and simples for use against the various ailments that troubled them from time to time. The furniture in the house was primitive. Table, stools, a chair or two, and a bench would furnish a living-room. Carpets were not often met with; mattresses, bolsters, and pillows were stuffed with feathers. Sheets and table-cloths were of flax or hemp; dishes were of brass or pewter. Wooden trenchers and pewter spoons were in common use, and most houses held the

necessary equipment for baking bread, brewing ale, and weaving wool. Cooking was primitive; good cooks were not required unless the occasion was an extraordinary one. People rose early and retired early; there was no temptation to be out late in filthy, ill-lighted streets, and bed was the only comfortable place in a house after nightfall. Doubtless the conditions were favourable to deep drinking among those who were not limited to the ale-house, and consequently could escape from the vigilant eye of authority.

The apprentice system was in vogue at Stratford in Shakespeare's time, and though the condition of apprentices was not always creditable to their employers, the system ensured a thorough knowledge of any business that a man sought to establish. The apprenticeship was a legal condition, precedent to setting up in business, and until a lad had fulfilled his indentures he could not open a shop on his own account or claim the rights of a freeman. Apprentices had their rights and privileges, including certain holidays, but they might not carry arms, might not visit ale-houses, and might not stay out after nine o'clock. For lads who did not care to settle down in business, or had not the means to establish themselves in one, there were other ways of securing a living. They could seek military service—there was always a demand for strong, athletic young men—or they could enter the big establishments of the great landowners, who employed scores of retainers, and, in peaceful

times, did not overwork them. The wealthier lads went to the universities or to the metropolis, where no small proportion, freed from all restraint, went hopelessly to the bad. In Shakespeare's time, the Earl of Leicester, Lord Compton, Sir Thomas Lucy of Charlecote, and a few others, were the chief men in the neighbourhood of Stratford to keep retainers in large numbers.

SHAKESPEARE MEMORIAL THEATRE, STRATFORD-ON-AVON

CHAPTER XIV

THE CLOSE OF LIFE

When Shakespeare settled down in Stratford to spend the last years of his life amid its familiar surroundings, he could without a doubt have aspired to the highest honours in the corporation's gift. He had restored his father's good name, and John Shakespeare in his palmy days had been Stratford's chief alderman. The early history of his escapades had apparently been forgotten; he was on friendly terms with the then owner of Charlecote Park, while other great landowners who passed a part of their time at Court were to be found among his acquaintances if not his friends. But he had not retired from the stress and strife of London to seek responsibilities that entailed heavy penalties for neglect. It sufficed him to take a friendly interest in the affairs of the corporation, and to remain right outside the council chamber. His own obligations might call him to town at any moment, and his own local affairs would have taken so much of the rest of his time as he would be disposed to give to business. Clearly he wished to enjoy his life, and from the scanty records in our possession there is reason to believe that he did so. Doubtless he added much to his ample stores of

observation; the few last years could hardly have been wasted; but apparently he had no wish to set pen to paper when he had left the stage behind him. It may be that, had he been disposed to work in the later years, the Gunpowder Plot might have afforded him material for a stirring play. Ambrose Rookwood, who was closely associated with the conspiracy, lived in Clopton House near Stratford.

The Clopton family was closely identified with Stratford's history. Sir Hugh, of that family, had been Lord Mayor of London in 1492. He it was who built New Place, the house in which the poet was living. He built the stone bridge over Avon at Stratford, to take the place of a worthless wooden structure. He founded exhibitions at Oxford and Cambridge Universities. In short, Sir Hugh made the reputation of the family for all time, and the scandal of Rookwood's residence in Clopton House, which is within easy reach of Stratford, must have been a considerable one.

There is a suggestion that the poet had not only given up his work, but that the taint of landowning under the existing conditions had corrupted him. As late as 1614 he was assisting one William Combe, a landowner and son of his old friend John Combe—who had left him five pounds by will—in an attempt to enclose the common lands round his estate at Welcombe. In the early days the poet had been a foe of those who attempted to rob the people, but it may be that by 1614 he was growing a little intolerant of the Puritans on the corporation council, and quite ready to vex

them if he could. The Clerk to the Council followed Shakespeare to London, apparently in order to discuss the case against William Combe, and the corporation in council drew up a letter to the poet, begging him to aid them against the guilty landowner; but Shakespeare did not do so, and it was left for the London courts to settle the matter in favour of the corporation, after much litigation and long delays.

The opening days of 1616 saw the marriage of Judith Shakespeare, the poet's daughter, born with little Hamnet who had died twenty years before. Two months later the poet entertained Michael Drayton and Ben Jonson at New Place. Some biographers say that the meeting was associated with a drinking bout —there is no reason to believe that either of his distinguished visitors would have been averse from one. Others believe that the poet fell a victim to the prevailing lack of sanitation; his house was at the corner of a very dirty lane. Whatever the cause, there can be no doubt about the result. On the 23rd of April 1616, England's greatest dramatist died in the prime of life—he was just fifty-two years of age. Two days later he was buried in Stratford Church, near the north wall of the chancel. Fearful lest his bones should be added to the grisly burden of the charnel-house close by, he penned a curse upon those who should disturb his remains.

The corporation's leading members joined the funeral procession, and a banquet consoled the mourners. A monument was put up in the chancel a few years later,

the work of a London sculptor living near the "Globe Theatre." It is not a very pleasing piece of work. By his will, the poet left substantial legacies to his daughters, a gift to Stratford's poor, and mementoes to many friends, but to his wife he left his "second best bedstead" and nothing more. Anne Shakespeare died seven years later, and was buried close to her husband. His neglect of her by will does not imply indifference to her future; doubtless he had expressed his wish that one or other of his daughters should look after her, but it is clear that he did not hold her in great affection.

So passed a great man from his world, leaving an imperishable monument for generations yet to come. The London he knew has passed beyond our ken; it is a buried city that will never be unearthed. But time has dealt more gently with Stratford and Shottery, Wilmcote and Snitterfield, and a large part of the surrounding country that made our national poet articulate. Much that he loved returns with the yearly pageant of the seasons, and with this we must be perforce content.

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